

# socialist standard

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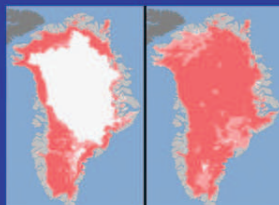
## Monkey Business

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Pinker on his  
"Angels"**

## Marxism and Anthropology



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# socialist standard

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The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be on **Saturday 7 December** at the address above. Correspondence should be sent to the General Secretary. All articles, letters and notices should be sent to the Editorial Committee.

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# Introducing The Socialist Party

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The Socialist Party is like no other political party in Britain. It is made up of people who have joined together because we want to get rid of the profit system and establish real socialism. Our aim is to persuade others to become socialist and act for themselves, organising democratically and without leaders, to bring about the kind of society that we are advocating in this journal. We are solely concerned with building a movement of socialists for socialism. We are not a reformist party with a programme of policies to patch up capitalism.

We use every possible opportunity to make

new socialists. We publish pamphlets and books, as well as CDs, DVDs and various other informative material. We also give talks and take part in debates; attend rallies, meetings and demos; run educational conferences; host internet discussion forums, make films presenting our ideas, and contest elections when practical. Socialist literature is available in Arabic, Bengali, Dutch, Esperanto, French, German, Italian, Polish, Spanish, Swedish and Turkish as well as English.

The more of you who join The Socialist Party the more we will be able to get our ideas across, the more experiences we

will be able to draw on and greater will be the new ideas for building the movement which you will be able to bring us.

The Socialist Party is an organisation of equals. There is no leader and there are no followers. So, if you are going to join we want you to be sure that you agree fully with what we stand for and that we are satisfied that you understand the case for socialism.

**If you would like more details about The Socialist Party, complete and return the form on page 23.**



# socialist standard

NOVEMBER 2013

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## Editorial

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### What it Means to be Human

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SOCIALISTS ARGUE that the current way of organising society is not the best one. This naturally means that we are interested in alternative forms of social system. We propose a classless society based on common ownership, and we present arguments to support the view that such a system (socialism) is both realistic and preferable. There are plenty of other suggestions along similar lines, such as the science fiction writer Ursula Le Guin's novel *The Dispossessed*, with its depiction of a radically egalitarian and non-hierarchical world.

Various disciplines deal with different types of social organisation: politics, economics, history, sociology. But perhaps the widest-ranging is anthropology, which has been defined as 'the study of humankind – of ancient and modern people and their ways of living' (Marvin Harris). Which makes it a pretty comprehensive science, covering everything from biological evolution and the spread of homo sapiens around the earth to language and the development of art and religion, and much more besides. Incidentally, Le Guin's parents were both anthropologists.

This issue contains a number of articles on anthropology, designed to explore the socialist case by discussing various forms of society, how they came into being, just how people live in such societies and whether they have anything to teach us nowadays. Are some of these alternatives just primitive set-ups that are appropriate for technologically-simple people living in small bands who survive by hunting animals and foraging for fruit and vegetables, or do they show that other

systems are viable ways for people to organise themselves?

Forty years ago Marshall Sahlins published a book *Stone Age Economics* that began with a chapter entitled 'The original affluent society'. Against the prevalent view that life was hard for hunter-gatherers, he argued that their wants were easily satisfied, since they desired little. Free from the influences of markets, advertising and pressures to consume, they 'lived in a kind of material plenty' and worked just a few hours a day. Dan Everett writes of the Pirahã, hunter-gatherers who still live in Brazil, that they 'show no evidence of depression, chronic fatigue, extreme anxiety, panic attacks, or other psychological ailments common in many industrialized societies'.

It is clear, then, that alternatives to a system based on wage labour and capital are perfectly possible. It is not just a matter of how people get their means of subsistence, though. Anthropologists have studied many people who live in essentially stateless societies, with nothing resembling modern-day governments. The exact status of 'primitive communism' is a controversial area, but there is little doubt that societies structured along similar lines existed for millennia.

At the very least, the study of anthropology, the study of humankind, demonstrates that capitalism is not the sole way of running society and that alternatives, based more on sharing and caring and co-operation, are available and maybe even preferable. We hope this issue will help you to reflect on these and similar topics.

## Digging up the dirt

NEW EXCAVATIONS are suggesting that some complex settled societies sprang up thousands of years before agriculture, in a complete reversal of orthodox thinking about the Neolithic revolution. A dig at Wadi Faynan in south Jordan has unearthed what looks like an amphitheatre dated 11,500 years old, some three thousand years before settled farming, while another dig at Göbekli Tepe in southern Anatolia has revealed the world's first temple, dated 11,000 years old (*New Scientist*, 5 October). According to orthodox prehistoric hunter-gatherer (HG) communities, being nomadic due to the need to range for scarce food, were incapable of population expansion, of developing surpluses or 'wealth', and of creating sophisticated urban cultures, social stratification, writing and organised religion. This is why the Neolithic or agricultural revolution is called a revolution. An HG community with a theatre is understood to be about as likely as a fossilised rabbit found in a dinosaur's stomach.

If temples and amphitheatres came first and agriculture came after, could it be that social and not material forces were the driving factor of change – ideology before subsistence? Perhaps HG groups invited a lot of people to ritual raves and then found they needed to develop better ways of producing food on-site. Instead of temples being a product of urban life, perhaps temples gradually grew villages and towns around themselves like particles attracting mass.

But the materialist view, upon which the case for socialism is built, doesn't insist that settled civilisation depended on agriculture, it only says that settled civilisation depended on a reliable food supply. In most cases that would have meant agriculture, but if it could be provided some other way, eg. by natural abundance or spaceships dropping food parcels, then so be it. Apparently these sites were stocked up food-wise, but pre-agriculture this could hardly have been the norm. A neo-Hegelian counter-attack against materialism, whereby culture determines material conditions, doesn't seem on the cards quite yet.

Another major boulder was dropped in the anthropological pond recently by Steven Pinker's recent book *The Better Angels of our Nature* (reviewed on page 20, short interview on page 13).

Pinker's theory can also be seen as ammunition against socialism, for two reasons. First, if capitalism is able to deliver peaceful non-violence, even in theory, a major plank of the socialist case against it is removed, since that case argues that capitalism is intrinsically violent and divisive. Secondly, it upends fondly-held ideas about so-called primitive communism in which Mesolithic hunter-gatherer bands existed in a state of noble grace until mean old property-based society came along to turn free love into Fight Club.

Does Pinker intend his argument to be used this way, as neo-Hobbesian propaganda? Probably he won't lose sleep if it is, given his own unexamined assumptions about what socialism really is (ie. Stalin, tanks and purges). But the evidence is what it is. If it is damaging to the socialist case, that's a problem for us.

In the first place, accepting for argument's sake that the murder rate has declined through history (and guessing about prehistory), we would have to congratulate capitalism on a job well done. Or partly well done. Credit where it's due. But could it achieve zero-crime and zero-violence in the future? Perhaps, with hyper-surveillance and the utter subjugation of workers, mind and body. It's hard to see how it could achieve zero-war unless one ruling class were able to destroy all the other ruling classes in a global war and then dominate the smoking ruins that were left. That capitalism has made progress in reducing

violence does not mean that it will continue to do so, or that socialism could not do better.

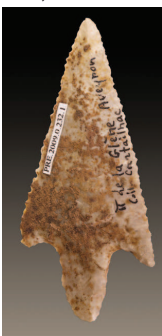
In the second place, it is not supposed that primitive communism was a Garden of Eden, merely that it was unlikely to have been a warzone. Marx and Engels speculated that, in the absence of property relations before agriculture, there would be no material incentive for class society, war, female oppression and all the other features of today's 'civilised' world. And indeed, there's no sign of prehistoric warfare, weaponry, fortifications and the like, despite the fact that the available evidence is more than enough to reveal such signs if they were there. Such signs tend to be unambiguous and hard to miss. Incidences of conflict prior to 10,000 years ago constitute a 'tiny handful' and 'are very much the exception'. Conversely, the 11,500 year old Abu Hureya settlement near the Euphrates, for example, shows continuous occupation for 4,000 years with no sign of violence whatever (John Horgan, *Scientific American* blog, 29 June 2010).

Suppose, again for argument's sake, one were to leap the credibility gap and grant Pinker the best possible case, that violence has been endemic in all human societies, no matter how far back you go, no matter what the material conditions. Even then, would this prove that aggression was written into the genes, as Pinker and others are wont to conclude? No, it wouldn't. It would only prove that material conditions were not the only factor behind violence. Marx's argument about materialism was not that it was the sole factor in determining social conditions, but that it was the decisive factor among several. In prehistoric societies there could have been other factors at play.

A recent study of 'lethal aggression events' among mobile forager bands seems to bear this out ('New study of foragers undermines claim that war has deep evolutionary roots', *Scientific American*, 18 July). Of the 21 groups observed, three had no lethal events whatsoever, a problematical result for Pinker and other natural violence advocates. Of 148 documented events only two were due to fights over resources, most of the others being 'miscellaneous personal disputes' such as insults, jealousy and theft – interestingly suggesting that property concepts cause trouble even in HG bands. Significantly, the most common cause of violence was revenge for previous attacks, showing that violence once established breeds more violence. Almost all the events involving multiple attackers and multiple victims, which the observers categorise as 'war', stemmed from just one group.

Not content with arguing for natural human aggression, some enthusiasts want to trace it all the way back to our ape forebears. Notable here is Richard Wrangham with his 'demonic ape' thesis. But the evidence for innate ape violence is just as flimsy and opposition to it strong. 'Chimpicide' seems to be a cultural artefact, neither universal nor innate. The relatively peaceful bonobo pygmy chimp also stymies such claims. Meanwhile studies of the oldest known human ancestor, the 4.4 million year old *Ardipithecus ramidus*, have caused a 'tectonic shift' in anthropological circles recently, according to one researcher: 'We now know, especially in light of *Ardipithecus*, that hominids have always been a far less aggressive clade than are chimpanzees or even bonobos' (Horgan, 2010).

Why Pinker, Wrangham and others are so keen to show that violence is innate can only be guessed at. Were it true, capitalism could be acquitted of all war crimes and socialist revolution represented as pointless. At stake is the essential Hobbesian question, can we be free or must we always be ruled? Socialists say that we can and should be free, and we work to create a future in which humans make themselves anew and are not bound by supposed primitive behavioural urges, whether these are angelic or demonic.





# Life before and after capitalism

**There were at least 200 people packed in a lecture theatre at last year's Anarchist Book Fair on 27 October to listen to anthropologists Chris Knight and David Graeber discuss 'Life Without Capitalism'.**



David Graeber

Knight's anthropological work is inspired by a statement by Engels in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* that 'the overthrow of mother-right was the world-historic defeat of the female sex' and that this led to the end of primitive communism and the rise of class society and patriarchy.

Knight opened by stressing that we need to break out of the fictitious bubble of ideology which contains capitalism, bourgeois society, and the nuclear family. He argued that we should look to the primitive communism of hunter-gatherer societies. He referred to the Hadza people in Tanzania and the Mbendjele pygmies in the Congo who lived in egalitarian systems of social relationships and also mentioned that the Mbendjele people experiment with 'pendulum of power' relationships which swing between women rule and male rule.

Knight spoke of 'the human

revolution' that took place 100,000 years ago at the dawn of human society when there was a huge social, sexual and political revolution that brought about the primitive communist society of the hunter-gatherers. Knight believes this 'human revolution' can occur again.

Knight later discussed 'Lunate': the importance of the Moon in hunter-gatherer society, the menstrual cycle of 29.5 days, women's power in the primitive communism of hunter-gather society, and the need for horizontal decision-making and organisation in society, and the desirability of 'pendulum of power' relationships in a future anarchist communist society.

He concluded that we need to empower ourselves to take power, to slow time, manage the playful in the revolutionary process, build on



Chris Knight

the work achieved by the Occupy Movement, and that we need to set a future date for global insurrection, for example 2017, the anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution.

David Graeber spoke of more recent



Modern hunter-gatherers

history than Knight. He spoke of the Neolithic period of 5,000 years ago and the origin of money in violence, terror, the state, it arising out of a legal system to remedy violence, and as payment to standing armies (see August *Socialist Standard* on Graeber's book *Debt: The First 5,000 Years*).

Graeber also spoke about the early cities in Mesopotamia which he said were obsessed with equality, the paradox of commercial activity taking place in an equalitarian society, and that inequality was a reaction against standardisation. He referred to the rise of slavery, the enslavement of women, and the equivalences of the monetary system based on female fertility.

Graeber observed that the emergence of the state coincides with the appearance of beer. He is an Anarchist and was active in the Occupy Movement. He is also the author of the 2011 book *Debt: The First 5,000 Years* while Knight is author of the 1991 book *Blood Relations: Menstruation and the Origins of Culture*.

**STEVE CLAYTON**



## Thought About Joining The Socialist Party?

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## Religious Police and Women Drivers

GOVERNMENT ADVICE to anyone visiting Saudi Arabia includes the following:

'Saudi Arabia is an exclusively Islamic (Muslim) kingdom and Islam governs nearly every aspect of life. The public practice of any form of religion other than Islam is prohibited in Saudi Arabia. Severe punishment including imprisonment and deportation can result should such activities come to the attention of the authorities.' '... certain sexual behaviour like adultery or homosexual acts carry the death penalty in Saudi Arabia. So does apostasy (renunciation of the Muslim faith). The death penalty is carried out in public, usually by beheading' (www.gov.uk/living-in-saudi-arabia).

Yes, in Saudi Arabia Allah doesn't mess about when making sure his laws are observed. And to keep an eye on what's going on, according to the Koran, (Surah 82) we each have two angels watching over our shoulders recording everything we do (and yes, some people do take this nonsense seriously).

And, as if that were not enough, in Saudi Arabia Allah also has his own religious police force, the 'Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice' to keep an eye on things and enforce Sharia law.

During the recent National Day celebrations for example, when nationwide festivities were planned, they announced a ban on singing and dancing in public and warned that violators would be punished.

In another incident in March 2002, in order to preserve moral values, they prevented schoolgirls from escaping a burning school because the girls were not wearing headscarves, and were not accompanied by a male guardian. Fifteen girls died, and many more were injured as a result.

Exactly what qualities are required for the job is not clear, but claims have been made that they are staffed by ex-convicts whose only qualification is that they memorised the Koran in prison in order to reduce their sentence.

Another of their duties is to enforce the ban on women drivers – only men are allowed to hold driving licences in Saudi Arabia. Although the ban is informal (there is no section on driving violations in the Koran) it is strictly enforced. There is, however, a growing campaign to overturn the ban and activists are calling for women to take to the roads in protest.

This, of course, is seen as a threat to public morality by the devout, not to mention being a danger to the women themselves. One cleric, Sheik Saleh al-Lohaidan issued the following warning.

'If a woman drives a car, not out of pure necessity, that could have negative physiological medical impacts as functional and physiological medical studies show that it automatically affects the ovaries and pushes the pelvis upwards. That is why we find those who regularly drive have children with clinical problems of varying degrees'.

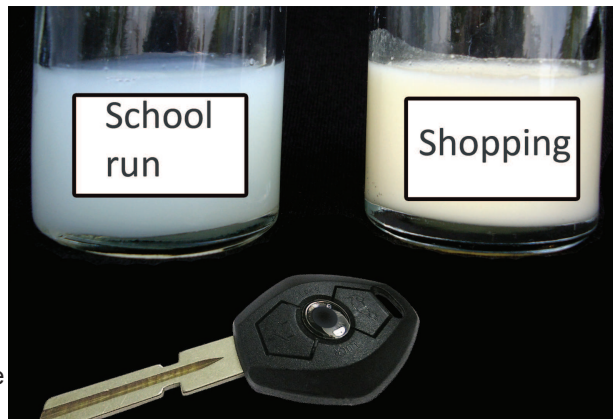
Could this ridiculous situation get any more absurd? Well, yes, it could. Back in 2010, in a completely unrelated controversy, another nutty cleric, Sheik Abdel Mohsen Obeikan announced that to overcome problems caused by the illicit mixing between sexes, women could be alone with, or appear without a veil in front of an unrelated male if he drank her breast

milk. This, the good cleric explained, would establish a mother-son bond in Islamic tradition.

A group of women protesters, who until now have had to rely on male drivers in order to get about, are now threatening (if that is the right word?) to breastfeed their drivers if they are not allowed to drive themselves.

And no, this is not a sketch from an old Monty Python show.

NW



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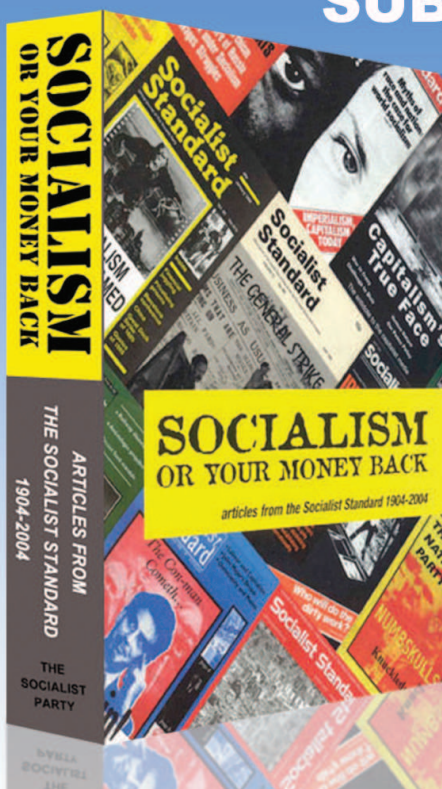
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THE INDEPENDENT







## Dirty talk at the Tory conference

'Profit is not a dirty word, says Cameron', read the headline in the *Times* (2 October), anticipating what he was going to tell the Tory conference that day:

'It is businesses that get wages in people's pockets, food on their tables, hope for their families and success for the country,' he will say. 'Profit, wealth creation, tax cuts, enterprise: these are not dirty elitist words.'

Some of this is true, but some is not. It is true that businesses do pay people wages but it can be doubted that they provide 'hope for their families'. And 'wealth creation' is not a dirty word as long as it is understood that it is those who work for a wage who produce wealth not the business enterprises that employ them and only pay them as wages a part of what they produce.

As far as the workings of capitalism is concerned, Cameron's point is valid. For capitalism, profit is not a dirty word as it's what drives the system. It is an incentive to the profit-seeking businesses which control production under capitalism to produce, but only up to a point – the point at which it is no longer profitable to produce any more, even if some people's needs have not been met. 'No profit, no production' is a basic economic law of capitalism.

The pursuit of profits distorts production by only responding to what people can pay for rather than what they need, so the richer you are the more and better you get while the needs of those who can't pay are not met. 'Can't pay, can't have' is another basic economic law of capitalism.

The pursuit of profits also leads from time to time to overproduction (in relation to the market not needs) and the sort of economic downward that we are now in. No wonder supporters of capitalism have to work hard to try to convince people that profit is not a dirty work.

A couple of days earlier the Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne, also had a go at criticising socialism, saying that for Ed Miliband (as if he was a socialist):

'the global free market equates to a race to the bottom with the gains being shared among a smaller and smaller group of people. This is essentially the argument Karl Marx made in *Das Kapital*.'

Actually, Marx did say something like this, but in a speech he gave on Free Trade to a meeting of radical democrats in Brussels in 1848 rather than in *Capital*.

Osborne implies that, like what he accused Miliband of, Marx too wanted to try to protect people from the workings of the 'global free market'. But he didn't. He said he was in favour of free trade as he thought, somewhat over-optimistically, that this would speed the social revolution:

'But, in general, the protective system of our day is conservative, while the free trade system is destructive. It breaks up old nationalities and pushes the antagonism of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie to the extreme point. In a word, the free trade system hastens the social revolution. It is in this revolutionary sense alone, gentlemen, that I vote in favour of free trade.'

Socialists still look forward to the social revolution Marx was anticipating which will replace the capitalist world market by a global socialism where, on the basis of the common ownership of the world's resources, there would be production directly to meet people's needs rather than for sale on a market with a view to profit.

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# The future of climate talks

AT 5AM on 27 September, after days of discussion at a plenary meeting in Stockholm culminating in an all-night session, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) finalized its Fifth Assessment Report. Each successive report – the earlier reports appeared in 1990, 1995, 2001 and 2007 – has contained stronger predictions than the one before. Thus, the new report envisions sea level rise of up to one meter by 2100, as compared to an upper limit of 60 cm in the fourth report.

However, climatologist Michael Mann, director of the Earth Systems Science Center at Pennsylvania State University, points to 'a credible body of scientific work' suggesting that 'business as usual' emissions are likely to produce a sea level rise of *two* meters by 2100, submerging large coastal areas around the world. Professor Mann accuses the IPCC of 'conservatism and reticence' – failings he attributes partly to the caution inherent in the culture of science and partly to political pressures (even the IPCC's report admits that sea level rise may reach two or three meters by a later date).

The magnitude of sea level rise depends in large measure on the fate of the Greenland Ice Sheet (GIS). The fourth report predicted that a rise in mean global temperature of 2°C above the pre-industrial level could trigger loss of the GIS. This was one of the reasons why a rise of over 2°C was defined as 'dangerous' and preventing such a rise set as a policy goal. Now, with the ice sheet starting to collapse before our eyes, the IPCC has acknowledged that a rise of even 1°C above the pre-industrial level may be enough to melt the GIS. But we are already 0.8°C above the pre-industrial level!

So preventing 'dangerous' climate change is no longer a plausible policy goal. Dangerous climate change is already upon us – a rather inconvenient fact for 'moderate' politicians who seek to reassure public opinion. Should they join the obscurantists who deny the science? Or should they espouse a more modest policy goal? But what exactly?

## Implications of the 'carbon budget'

Despite its vulnerability to political pressure, the IPCC has adopted a new concept with quite radical policy implications. The fifth report for the first time lays out a global cumulative *carbon budget*, drastically limiting how much more carbon – in the opinion of the IPCC – can be released into the atmosphere.

Diplomats are reported to be 'concerned that discussions around a carbon budget could derail the already fragile process of negotiations on climate' (Fiona Harvey, *The Guardian Weekly*, 4 October). Indeed, were governments officially to adopt this approach, they would be openly acknowledging that most known reserves of fossil fuels must be *left in the ground*. And, of course, they would also be acknowledging that it makes no sense to continue prospecting for new deposits.

This would mean a deep change in perception – oil, gas and coal would be seen no longer as precious *wealth* to be coveted, exploited and fought over, but rather as repulsive *'illth'*

threatening the health and life of humanity and the biosphere.

George Monbiot complains that for some reason governments just do not seem able to make this switch:

'Press any minister on this matter in private and, in one way or another, they will concede the point. Yet no government will act on it... Governments everywhere are still seeking to squeeze every drop out of their own reserves, while trying to secure access to other people's' (*The Guardian Weekly*, 4 October).

To this one could add that for quite a few governments the exploitation of new hydrocarbon deposits remains the centrepiece of long-term national economic strategy. The Russian government, with its extensive territorial claims in the Arctic, is an especially striking example. They evidently fail to appreciate the irony in the fact that it is global heating itself that is making many of these deposits accessible.

## Why so obtuse?

Why then are governments so obtuse? Is the logic underlying

the carbon budget really so difficult for them to grasp?

As Monbiot discovered, government ministers as private individuals may understand the situation well enough. But the governments in which they hold office are not free agents.

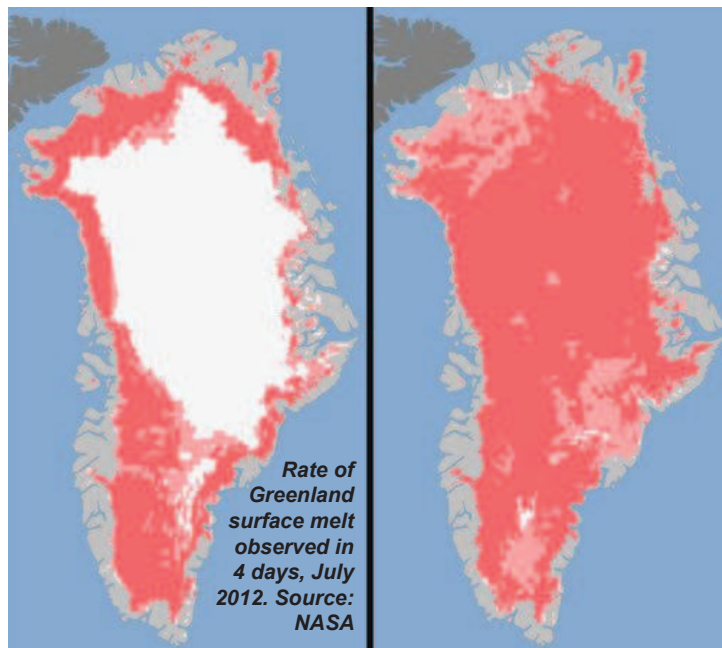
The government of a country exists primarily to ensure optimal conditions for the accumulation of national capital – the wealth (value) owned by that country's corporate and state capitalists – in competition with other national capitals. The process of capital accumulation is endless and serves no purpose outside itself.

A government that defies the imperative of capital accumulation in any significant way immediately comes under pressure so intense that it is forced either to change course or to resign. This is probably what would happen to any government that demanded fossil fuels be left in the ground, however profitable extracting and selling them might be to the companies concerned. Only extremely strong and persistent popular counter-pressure might give a government some room for manoeuvre.

The international climate negotiations may fail, but is that in itself cause for regret? So far these negotiations have achieved little of substance, apart from raising false hopes and creating new financial instruments for speculative profiteering. If talks break down because governments cannot accept measures that their own scientific experts tell them are necessary, that will starkly demonstrate that it has become impossible to reconcile the imperative of capital accumulation with the requirements of human survival.

A choice has to be made. It is no longer a matter of 'socialism or capitalism' or even 'socialism or barbarism'. The choice now is between world socialism and global catastrophe.

STEFAN







# Kinnock in the news again

ANYONE WHO suffers from a sense of being unvalued, or disregarded, might find some relief in the recent experience of Neil Kinnock. Or rather the

Noble Baron Kinnock of Bedwellty, previously Member of Parliament, Leader of the Labour Party and of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, European Commissioner, Chairman of the British Council...and lifelong supporter of Cardiff City Football Club, recently promoted to the Premier Division and infamous for the aggressive, disruptive behaviour of its fans. In September he went to watch Cardiff play Fulham at Craven Cottage. Although a seasoned football follower like Kinnock should have known better, he chose to sit with his family among the Fulham supporters. In the twelfth minute Cardiff scored a goal which had Kinnock, in his own words, 'wildly ... expressing great joy, standing up...' Within a minute he got some attention from the stewards who 'advised' him to move his party to the Cardiff section of the crowd, where they were greeted '...with some warmth'.

## The Sun

Shortly after the exposure of his antics at Craven Cottage Kinnock was in the news again, competing with Ed Miliband for sympathetic attention during the *Daily Mail* campaign about the Labour leader's father 'hating Britain'. He said he had similarly suffered, especially during the 1992 general election when the *Sun* had devoted its front page to the infamous headline 'If Kinnock wins today will the last person to leave Britain please turn out the lights' followed on the day after the election with the claim that 'It's the *Sun* Wot Won It'. He also had something to say about the *Daily Mail* editor, the gruesome Paul Dacre, who complained that Kinnock had avoided going to lunch with him when the only purpose in doing so would have been for Dacre to observe whether Kinnock held his knife and fork properly. This was all a part of Kinnock's assiduously constructed image of the humble son of a Welsh miner who won his way to a sparkling education and then to almost the very top in government. But it said nothing about his own readiness to attack opponents, particularly those in his own party, as abrasively as anything thought up in Fleet Street. One of Labour's leading lights during Kinnock's time, Denis Healey, praised his 'incandescent oratory', a possible example of which was his attack at Labour's 1985 conference on the Liverpool members for their 'far-fetched resolutions ... pickled into a rigid dogma, a code ...the grotesque chaos of a Labour council ...hiring taxis to scuttle round a city handing out redundancy notices to its own employees'.



Neil Kinnock

## In the sea

Kinnock was elected leader at the 1983 Labour conference in Brighton. To celebrate he went for a walk along the beach accompanied by his wife and a clutch of TV cameras. It turned out to be somewhat symbolic. This young, loud, fiery left winger walked too close to the encroaching tide, a sudden surge knocked him down onto the wet shingle, he quickly scrambled to his feet and turned to face the cameras laughing defiantly and waving a clenched fist to show how he would punch out

anyone who denied that this was a new Labour Party. His mission was to purge the inconvenient ideas which some restless party members still regarded as essentially matters of principle. Like all that nonsense in Clause Four about the ownership of the means of production and exchange (which had to wait for abolition until Tony Blair); unilateral nuclear disarmament; local parties having too much say in making national policy; those pesky Militant people who had come into the party nursing tortuous intentions to radically change society. With the hand of the insidious Peter Mandelson on the tiller Labour navigated through two elections, in both of which they fooled themselves that they were on the verge of power (in the after-assessment of their 1992 election one of their perceived mistakes was the 'triumphalist' – taking too much for granted – style of their eve of poll campaign). In the end Kinnock's aggression against any ideas which he saw as voter-repellent was not effective. He retired from the scene with the unenviable record of being the longest-serving Leader of the Opposition to fail to make it to Prime Minister. It was not at all as he had envisaged it, that day he fell into the sea.

## Peerage

But there were other, very lucrative, opportunities open to him – such as European Commissioner, which in 1976 he had described as 'a tariff club administered by an unelected commission and a bureaucracy with the principal objective of sustaining a capitalist market economy' but which, during his time in office between 1995 and 2004 (while he imposed savage cuts in staff wages and pensions) yielded him some £2.5 million in salary, expenses, pension and the like. Shortly after his term in Europe came to an end he announced that he had '...accepted the kind invitation to enter the House of Lords as a working peer for practical political reasons'. He was not deterred by his established reputation as a bitter opponent of the Upper House, for example in 1976: 'The House of Lords must go – not be reformed, not be replaced, not be re-born in some nominated, life after death patronage paradise, just closed down, abolished, finished'. In case he was misunderstood, in 1977 when the MPs walked to the Lords to hear the Queen's speech to open Parliament he stayed defiantly seated in the Commons alongside the Beast of Bolsover Denis Skinner.

## Blair approval

Kinnock's story has been a bit like someone recovering from a serious illness; one after another the symptoms of all those fevered days as a troublesome, agonisingly ambitious left-winger died away to be replaced by convalescent signs of conformity. He strongly supported Michael Foot in his turn-about over the Falklands War, including the sinking of the *Belgrano*. And he backed the British attack on Iraq on the feeble excuse that the infamous liar Tony Blair had assured him that the Americans would safeguard the situation there after the war. Such political acrobatics were, of course, warmly approved by Blair, who noted in his book *A Journey* that as a result of Kinnock's leadership the Labour Party became 'broadened and ...more popular'. Nothing more needs to be said about Kinnock's relentlessly cynical betrayal of so much that he once proclaimed as promises to radically transform society to humanity's benefit. An overview of his time reveals his passionate support for Cardiff FC to be a lone example of consistency.

IVAN

# Karl Marx :

# Anthropologist

*Text of a talk given by guest speaker Brian Morris at a Socialist Party meeting in London on 21 April this year*

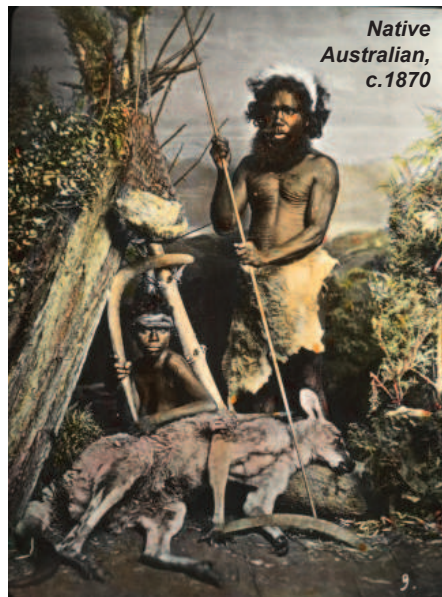
The Polish philosopher Leszek Kolakowski began his well-known history of Marxism with the words 'Karl Marx was a German philosopher'. True: Marx studied philosophy at the University of Berlin in his early twenties, and had a passion for German philosophy, particularly that of Hegel, but it hardly needs saying that Marx cannot be understood simply as a philosophical thinker. Better known, perhaps, as a political journalist, an erudite economist, and a revolutionary socialist, Marx was also, in an important sense, an anthropologist, for he always repudiated scholastic metaphysics. He can indeed be described as one of the founding ancestors of anthropology.

But what also has to be recognized is that Marx was an absolutely voracious reader, endlessly taking notes on everything that he read. He was therefore well versed not only in philosophy, economics, history and the natural sciences, but also in literature, being particularly fond of the poetry of Aeschylus, Shakespeare and Goethe. Marx had a truly encyclopaedic mind, a restless and inquiring intellect, and was interested, as an anthropologist, in understanding all aspects of life.

The German Enlightenment scholar Immanuel Kant – like Marx Kant was more than simply a philosopher – famously defined anthropology as the study of what it means to be human. Marx's anthropology, as Thomas Patterson affirmed, was largely derived from the Enlightenment. It was a kind of anthropology, however, that was critical, dialectical and historical, and it involved the embrace of some of the key tenets of the Enlightenment legacy: the importance of rationality, and the use of reason, along with that of empirical knowledge; the acknowledgement of the existence of the natural world independent of human cognition and representation; the fundamental importance of human freedom; the denial of all knowledge claims based on authority or mystical intuition; and a

recognition of the historicity not only of nature but of human beings and human social life and culture.

Scholars within the Enlightenment tradition, scholars as different as Erich Fromm and Bruce Trigger, have long recognized that there is an essential 'paradox', or basic contradiction at the heart of human life, an inherent duality in social existence. On the one hand humans are fundamental organic beings, and intrinsically a part of nature. On the other hand, through their self-consciousness, sociality and symbolic culture they are in a sense unique and separate from nature. They have what Cicero called a 'second nature'. The social ecologist Lewis Mumford suggested that humans have a 'twofold' life. Anthropology, as Marx envisaged it, firmly embraced this paradox, putting an equal emphasis on our organic life and our



shared humanity (as with Kant) and on the social and cultural diversity of human life (as with Herder). As Marx expressed it in his definition of communism, anthropology entailed a combination of naturalism and humanism.

Drawing on the Enlightenment legacy, Marx's anthropology, as a study of what it means to be human, is focussed around four key concepts – namely, nature, society, history and science – concepts which some contemporary anthropologists treat with unwarranted scepticism, if not with derision. We may explore Marx's own conception of anthropology and the human subject in relation to

these four fundamental concepts.

## Nature

Although Marx was an ontological realist, affirming the existence of a physical world independent of humans, this, of course, did not imply a dualistic metaphysic (as Karl Popper implied), or the idea that humans were independent of nature. To the contrary, Marx, in contrast to most sociologists and contemporary postmodernist anthropologists, strongly emphasized that humans were natural beings, and intrinsically a part of nature. As he put it: 'nature is man's inorganic body'. For Marx, humans were natural beings. They were active, living beings, embodied, sensuous, conscious, with feelings and emotions, and with inherent dispositions and capacities, as well as being, like other animals, limited, conditioned and suffering beings. The relationship between humans and nature was thus essentially *dialectical*, not simply relational.

This meant, of course, for Marx, that any understanding of human social life (or history) must begin with one basic premise: namely, the existence of human individuals, and the fact of their inter-relationship with the rest of nature. It was through their productive relations, their creative interactions with nature to meet then-basic needs, that humans produced their material life, or what Marx described as their 'modes of life'. Forms of consciousness, specifically culture or ideology, emerged, he felt, from within these 'real-life processes'. As Marx famously put it: 'life is not determined by consciousness but consciousness by life'.

Whether or not this implies a form of economic determinism has long been debated by scholars from right across the political spectrum. Given that Marx was essentially a dialectical thinker, the material aspects of human life must be seen as the basis or anchorage for cultural configurations, or what Ernst Cassirer described as symbolic forms (art, religion, philosophy, science) rather than involving any direct causal relationship.

Yet it is important to recognize that Marx fervently rejected the idea of a fixed human nature or essence, for in being a part of nature, rather than



the creation of some divine agent, humans had evolved historically. Marx saw no antithesis between nature and human history, and like Darwin, stressed the historicity of human nature. His lifelong associate and friend, Friedrich Engels, wrote a famous essay entitled *The Part Played by Labour in the Transition From Ape to Man*, stressing the importance of labour – human productive inter-actions with nature – in the emergence of ‘modern’ humans. Along with erect posture, the expansion and re-organisation of the human brain, the dexterity of the human hand, tool-making, language and symbolic culture, and the emergence of a more complex society, labour is seen by Engels (and Marx) as the key factor in the emergence of *Homo sapiens*.

## Society

The important point, of course, is that humans are not only natural beings, but also, Marx insisted, *human* natural beings, species-beings, with sociality and self-consciousness. Humans, therefore, as Marx continually stressed, are social beings, always enmeshed in a complex web of social relations. Our relationship with nature is therefore always intrinsically social, and even our perceptions of nature are socially and culturally mediated, though not wholly determined by our culture.

Importantly, as with later sociologists, Marx emphasized that human perceptions, thoughts and actions, are shaped to an important degree by the patterns of social relations, and the cultures into which humans are born, and which they help to actualize, maintain or transform. Marx famously remarked that humans make their own history but they do not make it just as they please, for past traditions always influence living humans. Marx was, therefore, one of the first social scientists to explore what later became known as the ‘duality’ between social structures (relations) and human agency, and, for Marx, this relationship between social forms and the human individual was always interdependent and *dialectical*.

Marx was therefore always critical of the two extremes in approaching this ‘duality’. The first extreme, as reflected later in Durkheimian sociology and culture theory (in its various guises) virtually oblates human agency, viewing human thought and action as largely determined or an ‘effect’ of either symbolic culture (as with Leslie White and many postmodernists)

or ideology (Althusser) or power (Foucault). Marx was critical of such sociological determinism, and (again) famously remarked:

‘History (that is, social life) does nothing, it does not possess immense riches, it does not fight battles! It is real living men who do all this .. History is nothing but the activity of men in pursuit of their ends’.

On the other hand, Marx was equally critical of the other extreme, which tended to put a fundamental emphasis on the individual, and to downplay or ignore the importance of history, and of social relations and culture. He was therefore always critical of the ‘abstract’ individual of the classical philosophers, who seemingly posited the human individual as outside nature and society. He thus made some trenchant criticisms of Feuerbach’s humanism, Stirner’s radical individualism, which in its emphasis on the unique ‘ego’ dismissed humanity as a ‘spook’, and the asocial possessive individualism of Hobbes and the bourgeois political economists. The political economists (Ricardo and Adam Smith) Marx famously dismissed as ‘Robinsonades’ (after Robinson Crusoe), for they began their analysis with the notion of a rational isolated individual, detached from social bonds, and assumed that this was a reflection of human nature.

In terms of contemporary social theory, Marx rejected both ‘sociological collectivism’ (or holism, mystical or otherwise) and methodological individualism (Popper and rational choice theorists).

## History

Many scholars have stressed that Marx viewed the human subject as a dialectical unity, as intrinsically and simultaneously both a natural and a social being. But as a revolutionary socialist Marx also emphasised that all humans have a unique personal identity – a sense of self with moral and social agency. And he was centrally concerned not with autonomy, but rather with social freedom, and the self-expression of the human individual. Marx thus expressed an understanding of the

human subject in terms of a triadic ontology.

To illustrate this we may turn to the American anthropologist Clyde Kluckhohn, the engaging ethnographer of the Navaho.

Kluckhohn once suggested that there were three distinctive ways of conceiving the human person; firstly that in some respects every person is like *every* other human being – as a species-being; secondly that they are like no other human being in having a *unique* personality (or self); and, finally, that they have affinities with some other humans in being social and cultural beings.

These three aspects of the human subject are an essential expression of the fact that humans are always embedded in three historical processes,

namely, the *phylogenetic*, pertaining to the evolution of humans as a species-being (humanity); the *ontogenetic*, which relates to the individual as a unique, embodied and psychological being (self); and, finally, the sociohistorical, which situates the human individual as a *person*, in a specific historical and ecological context.

Like Kant and Marcel Mauss, Marx therefore always recognized that the human being had, always and simultaneously, three distinct ‘natures’: a) as a species-being, a *human* nature (or identity) with essential needs, powers, capacities, and a history; b) as a ‘communal being’ or ‘an ensemble of social relations’ (as Marx put it), a *person* who enacted specific social roles and expressed certain social identities; and c) as an individual being, a self with a unique personality and subjective and moral agency. Marx was a humanist, in that he always emphasised the ‘individuality’ of the human person, and the fundamental importance of human freedom, viewed in terms of the self-determination and the self-expression of the individual. But like the social anarchists, Marx recognized and stressed that such freedom could only be achieved by the creation, through collective practice and struggle, of a truly socialist society, for humans were fundamentally social beings.



Lewis Henry Morgan

Freedom, for Marx, was social not metaphysical.

## Science

Within the Marxist tradition there has long been an on-going debate, and at times harsh polemical exchanges, between two contrasting interpretations of Marx.

On the one hand, there are those who are usually described as critical theorists or Hegelian Marxists, who stress the continuity between Marx and German philosophy, particularly that of Hegel. They focus on Marx's early writings on philosophical anthropology, situate themselves in the more literary and philosophical traditions of European culture, and adopt a more 'historicist' and 'humanistic' interpretation of Marx. The emphasis is on 'dialectics', 'humanism' and history, and they often express an aversion to science. A classic example is Erich Fromm, who described Marx as an existentialist humanist, centrally concerned with human dignity and freedom.

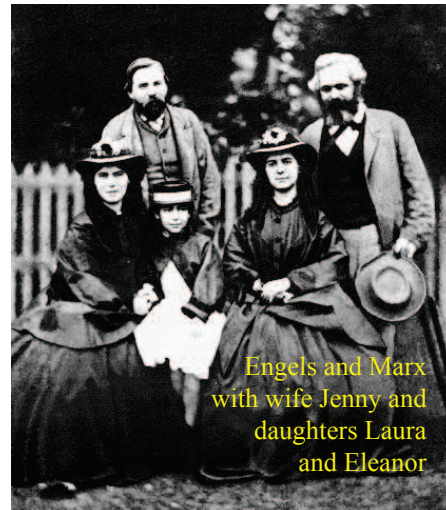
On the other hand, there are those Marxists who focus on Marx's later writings, particularly his profound analysis of modern capitalism *Das Kapital* (1867), which is essentially a work of empirical anthropology, replete with a welter of ethnographic data on industrial production and human life under capitalism. Such Marxists suggest that Marx made a clean break with Hegel's historicist philosophy, along with dialectics, and had pioneered a new scientific way of understanding human history. Louis Althusser is a key exemplar of the tendency to interpret Marx's anthropology as a 'science of history'. But in being stridently 'anti-humanist' and derisive towards history, Althusser tended to express a rather abstract and synchronic form of scientific understanding.

What many scholars have suggested, however, is that Marx's anthropology is best understood as a unique attempt to establish a dialectical social science. Marx thus envisaged anthropology as a historical science, one that would combine dialectics and science, historicism (humanism) and materialism (naturalism). It involved a rejection of both cultural idealism and positivism and all forms of reductive materialism. As Marx put it: 'the abstract materialism of a natural science that excludes the historical process is defective', for the only viable approach to the understanding of social life is one that is both materialist and historical. Such scientific

understanding, therefore, involves going beyond phenomenological description by exploring – explaining – how social and cultural phenomena 'came into being'. The anthropologist Franz Boas put this succinctly 'To understand a phenomenon we have to know not only what it is, but also how it came into being. Our problem is historical'.

Marx's anthropology can therefore be described in summary as at once dialectical, historical, materialist and scientific, as well as reflecting the 'critical spirit' of the Enlightenment.

Marx, of course, was primarily interested in economics and political theory, and is mainly known for writing the famous *Communist Manifesto* (1848) (along with Engels), and for his substantial economic treatise *Das Kapital*. But it has to be recognized that Marx was a world-historical thinker. As a political journalist he wrote extensively on India and colonialism. Always



fascinated by the diversity of human societies, both in the past and in his own time, Marx became deeply involved in studying pre-capitalist modes of production - communal (tribal societies), ancient (the classical civilisations of Greece and Rome), Germanic, Asiatic, Slavonic (specifically Russian serfdom) and European feudalism. These formed the socio-historical context with regard to the emergence and the expansion of the capitalist world economy. While in his last years Marx filled several notebooks – the ethnological notebooks -with observations and reflections on diverse anthropological topics, ranging from 'primitive communism' to the family and gender in the Roman Empire – notes derived from extensive reading. Marx was particularly interested in the work of the pioneer American anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan who wrote ground-breaking studies on the

Iroquois, on kinship systems, and on socio-cultural evolution. Morgan's *Ancient Society* (1877) was a landmark text in the development of anthropology. Significantly, Engel's seminal study *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884) is largely based on Morgan's work and on Marx's own notebooks.

Although Marx is invariably interpreted as a social evolutionist, who, like Morgan and Edward Tylor, viewed human history in terms of rigid unilinear 'stages', it is evident, as Patterson contends, that Marx had a much more complex conception of human history, one that implied multilineal 'pathways'.

Though an exemplary and pioneer anthropologist, Marx continues to be dismissed by contemporary liberal scholars as an intellectual 'relic', and held responsible for the authoritarian politics and tyranny of the Soviet Union under Stalin, and the Chinese state under Mao Zedong. Both, of course, were forms of state capitalism under a party dictatorship, and far removed from Marx's own embrace of democratic politics and his conception of a communist society. Perhaps, as a last word, we can quote from the pragmatist philosopher Sidney Hook, before he became an apologist for the American empire:

'Marx was a democratic socialist, a secular humanist, and a fighter for human freedom. His words and actions breathe a commitment to a way of life and a critical independence completely at odds with the absolute rule of the one-party dictatorship of the Soviet Union' – or that of any other political dictatorship'.

Marx was also an anthropologist and the advocate of anthropology as a humanistic science.

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# Steven Pinker clarifies his opposition to socialism



Steven Pinker

*Socialist Standard: Given your view that socialist communal ownership and cooperation is against human nature, do you see yourself as a latter day Thomas Hobbes, justifying the need for a coercive state apparatus to protect us from ourselves?*

I don't think that communal ownership and cooperation are against human nature, period – they are natural among blood relatives, close friends, and tightly knit tribes – but I am indeed skeptical that they are natural among strangers and acquaintances, to say nothing of entire large-scale societies. But yes, I am a Hobbesian, in the sense that I believe the evidence shows that a society with a democratic government, including a police force and judiciary (the coercive apparatus) is vastly less violent than a society living in anarchy. Hobbes himself was squishy about the 'democratic' part – he imagined that the state would somehow perfectly embody the interests of the people – and I depart from him in believing that democratic constraints on state power must be an explicit part of the social contract.

*SS: Your argument that levels of violence were highest among hunter-gatherer societies, thereafter declining to a record low in modern capitalism, has been hotly contested on the grounds that a) the modern primitive communities*

*you cite are not really hunter-gatherers and have in addition had decades of contact with modern capitalism and b) that you have overlooked many large wars and civilian war-related deaths in recent history. Are you simply cherry-picking the evidence to suit your theory?*

Absolutely not. For one thing, my argument rests on the distinction between anarchic and governed societies, not hunter-gatherers versus the rest. For another, I separate data from hunter-gatherers on the one hand, and hunter-horticulturalists and other tribal groups, on the other; the latter are indeed more violent than the former (on average), but both types of anarchical societies have enormously higher rates of violence than modern ones. Third, many of these estimates come from societies that had little to no contact with Westerners; the archaeological record, and many reports of first encounters with native peoples, indicate that they had high rates of violence well before they made contact with the West. Finally, my data for modern wars come from every independent dataset in the literature that I could find (including those of Quincy Wright, Pitirim Sorokin, L. F. Richardson, the Correlates of War Project, and, for more recent wars, the datasets from the Peace Research Institute of Oslo and the Uppsala Conflict Data Project. It's possible that they missed some small wars, particularly in earlier periods, but they certainly did not miss any large ones, particularly in recent times. The estimates all include civilian deaths. Some of them stick to violent battle-related deaths (as opposed to indirect deaths from disease or famine), others try to estimate total deaths; the text indicates which is which.

*SS: To evade the charge of genetic determinism in The Blank Slate you argued that we could tell our genes 'to go jump in the lake'. Surely, then, you cannot rule out socialist common ownership on genetic grounds?*

That's right, not a priori. All modern political systems are artificial, implementing designs that try to allow their citizens to prosper. Yet all of them have to take human nature into account, including the scope of our cooperative instincts, the incentives that drive us, the sources of our pleasure and pain, the differences among us, and the limitations on our powers of reason and decision-making. I suspect that regulated, safety-net capitalism of the form found in, say, today's Canada and Germany, are likelier to maximize human happiness under these constraints than the forced collectivism of Stalin and Mao. Presumably you have some third alternative in mind; in the absence of details I can't judge how well it would deal with the constraints imposed by human nature, but I'd argue that its success in bettering people's lives will depend on how well it deals with them.

(For a review of Pinker's latest book 'The Better Angels of our Nature', see page 20)



# How did **social inequality** arise?

*We look at one theory of the origins of hierarchy and social inequality.*

*Aerial photo of uncontacted Amazon tribe, Brazil, 2010*

**I**n *The Creation of Inequality: how our prehistoric ancestors set the stage for monarchy, slavery, and empire* Kent Flannery and Joyce Marcus begin with the notion that the fields of Anthropology and Archaeology should inform one another. Anthropology learns from humans within living memory what they think and feel; while archaeology provides silent clues to the past: buildings, tools or bones.

They build a detailed account of how over the last five thousand or so years, humans have built unequal societies. They examine the underlying cultural logic of different social formations to show how inequality, and subsequent formations, can arise. They deny any straight line model of social development, that one stage leads to another, but rather that each stage can allow the next development. They also note that it isn't a given level of technology or natural abundance that gives rise to different social formations (they note how the Andes, where the wheel was never even invented, can be seen as the graveyard of such theories). They suggest that over millennia, societies have oscillated between relatively equal or unequal forms, following 'social logic'.

## **Hunters-gatherers**

They begin with the most equal form of society: the nomadic extended kin group (such as has been encountered in the Arctic within historic memory). They observe that these groups of hunter/gatherers are relatively egalitarian, without formal leaders or classes. They also note that this distinguishes humans from our near primate relatives, who in similar bands operate either with alpha males or an alpha male/beta male coalition. They propose, though, that such dominance hierarchies and behavioural traits do remain in human communities; but that, rather, the function of the alpha male has been replaced by 'God' with beta coalitions replaced by interceding ancestors and spirits.

That is, people treat the deity and ancestors as if they were above them in a dominance hierarchy (such as, by adopting submission positions), and thinking of themselves as subordinates to these entities. All living humans thus become gammas, in effect equal in subordination. Religion, they suggest,

is accompanied by collective ritual, and by inducement of euphoric states to reinforce its effects.

As an aside, this is a fascinating concept, firstly because it does provide for the notion that there was a positive evolutionary reason for the development of the idea of god (which rebuts the arguments of some pro-theists who suggest the disutility of the idea as evidence for some real basis for religion). Secondly, it suggests a useful interpretation of contemporary political psychology. When dictators and their boot boys elevate themselves to godlike status or servants of god, they free themselves from the constraints imposed by such submission. As we shall see, below, the development of inequality was in part about the appropriation of divine sanction.

The hunter gatherer bands may have engaged in gift relations with other nearby bands. As the authors note, the emphasis would have been on seeking and maintaining social relations and retaining the possibility of help and assistance when things may have gone bad. They suggest that, rather than developing language to assist in practical tasks, language and symbolic thinking emerged as a means of coalition building and enabling links between extended kin groups. A development of this, for example, was the nomination of special friends for young males. They give the example of an Eskimo tribe, whose boys had friends allocated parts of a slaughtered seal, indicating their sharing of the goods. They also note the 'magic of names' where a bond is assumed between people sharing a name, even beyond a kinship relation.

They conjecture that it was such behaviour that gave rise to the extended clan-based society. A key feature of such a society is the notion of social substitutability. If a person commits a murder, say, it becomes acceptable to kill one of their clan as a substitute for retaliating directly against them individually.

## **Clan-based societies**

Clan-based societies can be very complex. Often, they are divided into two moieties, and the members of one clan from one moiety cannot marry with the members of clans from that same moiety. This can be further complicated



by lineages within clans, and much more specific clan-marriage-based arrangements (such as members of clan A always marry into clan D but not clan C).

Flannery and Marcus identify two important features of the cultural logic of such societies. The first is the principle of 'We were here first'. This has repercussions as certain clans begin to claim pre-ordination based on clans that are putatively descendants of later arrivals. The second is that individuals may have or acquire virtue. At first, this may be simply the difference between initiated men and un-initiated boys, later there may be stages to initiation, so that even some full grown men may lack virtue. They also note, by reference to Australian aboriginal tribes, that some clans can lay claim to a certain copyright of prestigious rites and rituals.

This sets the scene for the development of the next stage, the achievement-based societies. In hunter-gatherer and tribal societies, anyone getting too big for their boots and bossing others around would be quietly taken into a field and murdered. They also note that mockery, too, was a powerful tool for curbing ambition. In achievement based-societies, an individual could achieve the rank of chief, through a number of routes: success in warfare, or religious/ritual means being among them. The achievement at this stage is individual, and the chief is required to maintain their position through feasts and gift giving. Rank does not pass automatically to off-spring, but chiefs can take steps to try and confer honour on their children and put them in a strong position to achieve rank themselves.

The archaeological evidence at this stage consists of the examination of grave goods. The general absence of children with expensive funeral goods indicates that people did not have exalted status from birth, for example. A common feature of early human societies is the men's hut, a place where men go and perform rituals (possibly a development from the men staying together while hunting). In achievement societies this becomes the chief's hut, and the gradations within the men become apparent based on their sleeping position (the lowest ranked sleeping next to the door, thus being most at risk of being killed in a sneak attack).

Entire groups of people become known as 'Nothing men' with no status and no property to live off. The chief controls the land and natural resources: sumptuary goods come into existence, in the form of jade, gold or certain shells.

As the authors note, a feature of early human religion was that it could be frequently rewritten, based on new experiences and circumstances. In achievement societies, the leading

members of society try to cast themselves as nearer to god (or descended from god) and, often, as different from the rest of humanity. A part of this attempted appropriation, they suggest, is the gradual transformation of the men's hut into the public temple, and so that building becomes a key archaeological indicator of the development of hierarchy within a society.

### Hereditary rulers

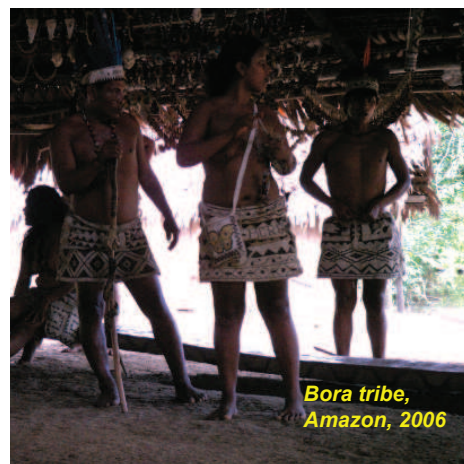
At its most fully developed, chiefly rank becomes hereditary. The chief becomes taboo, and no one may look at or touch him (often meaning foreigners have to be employed to assassinate him). Even his waste becomes charged with dangerous levels of virtue, and has to be safely disposed of. Instead of commanding great skill himself, he controls craftsmen who produce status goods, which he can distribute.

At this point, it should be noted, the authors present evidence of societies oscillating between equality and hierarchy, and elite groups lose their grasp on power (through incompetence, or in-fighting, or both). It should also be noted that these developments are not dependent on the state of agriculture or prevailing techniques of production, and seem to stem as much from the capacity of individuals at the right time taking chances and staking a claim to pre-eminence.

This is certainly the case for their model of the emergence of kingship: a distinct caste apart with an hereditary leader. Their basic model is that kingdom's emergence comes from a usurper taking control of a tribe and annexing nearby groups, in short, through a sort of revolution. They produce examples from African and Polynesian anthropology and history. They note that as hereditary rule emerges within one society, neighbouring societies begin to adopt more and more of its attributes, as a defensive mechanism. As with the move from achievement society to hereditary society, they suggest that multiple attempts to assert sovereignty may have been tried and failed before any given monarch ascended to the purple.

Empires continue the process of creating inequality, by denuding local elites of their power/virtue and creating a hierarchy of civic centres, with each successive layer subordinated to the centre and the king. Multiple strategies can be employed to achieve this (as can be said of each of the previous stages). Often, empires were born out of the ruins of preceding empires (as in the Andes), with successive waves of domination refining the process of conquering and absorbing neighbours.

If there is a flaw with the book, it lies in one of its great strengths. There is



Bora tribe,  
Amazon, 2006

a wealth of detail about a great many societies, but the continued listing of the dimensions of huts does get slightly in the way of progressing the book's points (and may inhibit its utility as a popular book).

Throughout there is a running side argument, around the nature of marriage. They note that historically it was a primarily economic arrangement, and they list at least seven different permutations of marriage (one man two women; one man one woman, two men, one woman, etc.) Their argument is very much with the so-called traditionalists whose model of marriage, they note, goes all the way back to the particular bureaucratic conditions of ancient Sumeria. Marriage, though, is often a route towards hierarchy, with control of marriage between people of high status being a means to create and sustain inequality.

They also touch on ancient warfare. They note how in clan societies, it has been known for the victors in a war to compensate the defeated for their dead, as a means of retaining social bonds and preventing conflict continuation. They show, through anthropological data from Polynesia, that tribal warfare was particularly brutal, with the sneak attack and massacre being favoured (the other evidence they have for this is the increasing incidence of defences around settlements as they develop). They point to Mesoamerican carvings to show how captives were taken and tortured in public display in kingdoms there.

The book does not conclude with any political programme. They do note that the attempt to impose hierarchy has been resisted at every stage. The nearest they come to a suggestion is an anecdote about an archaeologist whose proposal was to 'put hunter gatherers in charge'.

Overall, this is a worthwhile and important book in the description and articulation of how we came to be where we are. At the very least, it is an eye-opening description of the amazing and varied forms of human society. If nothing else, you can finally discover exactly what a Big Kahuna was.

**PIK SMEET**

# A modern denial of Pinker

In 1999 Steven Pinker threw down the gauntlet with his book *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature* in which he argued that selfish and aggressive human behaviour was hard-wired by the genetically-determined structure of the human brain. Writing as an ideologue and outside his specialist field of how the brain interprets sensations from the eyes, he proclaimed:

‘Those who believe that communism or socialism is the most rational form of social organisation are aghast at the suggestion that they run against our selfish natures.’

Although not written as such, *The Marvelous Learning Animal: What Makes Human Nature Unique* by Arthur Staats, a retired behavioural psychologist who specialised in child development, published last year by Prometheus Books, is in effect a rebuttal of what Staats calls the ‘Great Scientific Error’ and which Pinker exemplifies.

Staats traces this error back to a speculation by Darwin that human behaviours might also have been inherited by the same process of biological natural selection as the physical features of the human body. Staats argues that there is no validated evidence for this and that, on the contrary, ‘you are what you learn’; at birth the mind of the human child is, yes, a blank slate and its future personality and repertoire of behaviours depends on the way it will be brought up, on what and how it learns. He backs this up with the results of his own and others’ research in the field of child development.

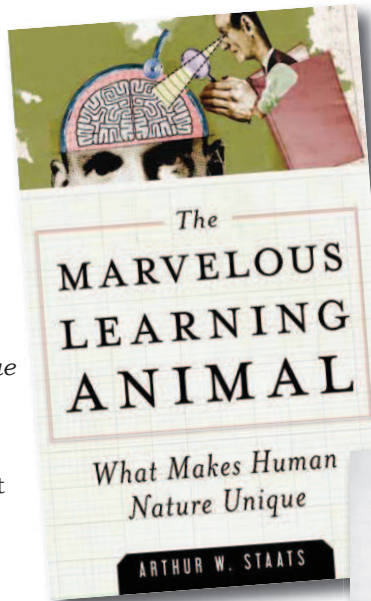
## Brain scans

Biological determinists like Pinker rely on findings revealed by brain scans which show that there are some differences in the brain features of, for instance, men and women, heterosexuals and homosexuals, people with personality disorders and people without, and children with autism and other children. The conclusion they draw is that it is these differences in the brain

that determine the differences in behaviour.

But hold on, says Staats, this doesn’t necessarily follow; we know that learning must change the brain, so that the brain differences could equally reflect different learning experiences. This, he suggests, is more likely, especially as those who

argue that the brain differences are inherited via genes have been unable to identify any gene governing behaviour (the only genes identified have been ones governing bodily features and defects) or even to explain,



Right: Arthur Staats



if such genes existed, how they would or could influence behaviour. ‘Brain changing does not produce learning; learning produces brain changes.’ Staats accepts that it has not yet been worked out how exactly learning changes the brain and calls for more research into learning.

## Learning animal

Part 2 on ‘The Human Animal’ explains how the human body (upright stance, binocular three-dimensional colour vision, vocal system capable of emitting a wide range of sounds, free hands with opposable thumbs, a big brain with a million million neurons), together with a prolonged period of growing up, makes humans a ‘learning animal’:

‘... we have been shaped by evolution to learn extensively. Humans encounter the richest of all learning environments. Systematic consideration indicates that our huge brains have been developed to learn the very complex

behaviours needed to adjust to that complex environment. Evolution constructed us to do that according to learning principles. Huge learning ability constitutes an essential, fundamental, deep, extensive, and valuable part of human nature. The human is a learning animal, better than any other, by a huge difference.’

## Cumulative learning

The distinguishing feature of human learning, he points out, is that it is ‘cumulative’ with what one generation of humans has learned being passed on to the next generation and extended. Most animals do learn some of their behaviour (more than is often assumed) but it is the same behaviour that is learned unchanged from generation to generation. Hence Staats’ conclusion that:

‘Generally it should not be assumed that the behaviour of any other animal can be studied as a means of knowledge of human behaviour. Humans are different than all other animals in learning.’

So much, then, for Konrad Lorenz, Richard Dawkins and their geese.

With humans, what has been learned can be passed on, by the non-biological means of culture, and has been:

‘There is no evidence of a genetically produced change in the



‘Brain changing does not produce learning; learning produces brain changes.’

human brain for a hundred or so thousands of years, during which time there have been fantastic advances in culture. This holds that the cultural advances in technology,

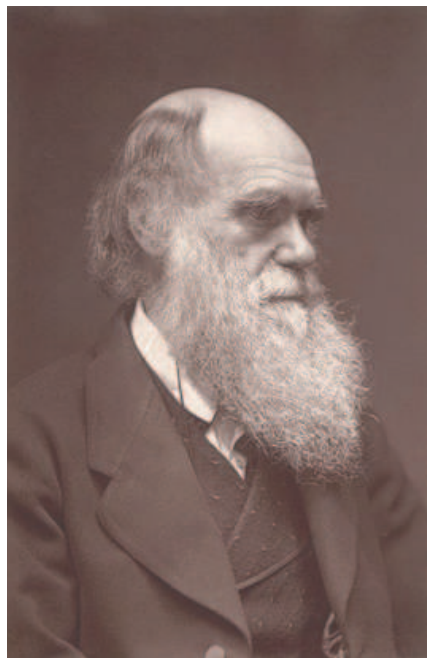


entertainment, politics, language, economics, education, inventions, and other social features are due to learning. There is no cultural evolution.'

To say that there is 'no cultural evolution' may seem odd as there is a sense in which there could be said to have been, but he means that the growth of culture does not take place in the same way as the evolution of the human body did.

### Human self-creation

Staats speculates that, in the later stages of the biological evolution towards *homo sapiens*, learned behaviour must also have played a part and he coins the term 'the human creation theory' of origin of humans. Some anthropologists have already come to a similar conclusion and talk of biological-cultural 'co-evolution',



**Darwin: speculated that human behaviours might also have been inherited by the same process of biological natural selection as the physical features of the human body**

or that, in the title of one of Gordon Childe's books, *Man Makes Himself*.

Staats calls for a paradigm shift away from genetic explanations of human behaviour to learning ones. Actually, until the 1970s, that humans were a 'culture-bearing animal' whose behaviour was learned was accepted by most cultural anthropologists. For instance, in his introduction to *Man and*

*Aggression* (1968) Ashley Montagu wrote:

'The notable thing about human

behaviour is that it is learned. Everything a human being does as such he has had to learn from other human beings. From any dominance of biologically or inherited predetermined reactions that may prevail in the behaviour of other animals, man has moved into a zone of adaptation in which his behaviour is dominated by learned responses. It is within the dimension of culture, the learned, the man-made part of the environment that man grows, develops, and has his being as a behaving organism.'

So what Staats is calling for is not so much a new paradigm as a return to the situation that existed before the biological determinist counter-revolution.

While Pinker reflects the current popular prejudice that human nature is a barrier to socialism, Staats looks forward to a time (which he considers inevitable in the long run, even if gradually)

'... when there is no race or other prejudice or mistreatment, no war, no exploitation of people by other people, no brutality, equitable abundance for all, and general kindness and compassion.'

**ADAM BUICK**

# 'Hovis Bakers Win Strike in Wigan'

**THE RECENT workplace dispute at the Hovis Bakery on Cale Lane in Wigan involving the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union (BFAWU) was over the use of zero-hours contracts, the introduction of agency staff, and the reduction in working hours. Some workers at the Wigan bakery had been on temporary zero hours contracts for up to three years before they were given full-time posts. The dispute was a clear example of the struggle between capital and labour and what Marx called the 'periodical resistance on the part of the working men against a reduction of wages, and their periodical attempts at getting a rise of wages'.**

BFAWU are the old bakers union founded in 1847 in Manchester by journeymen bakers who campaigned to secure the Bakehouse Regulations Act of 1863. The Union represents 30,000 workers in the food industry in Britain.

A one week strike by 210 workers began on 28 August 2013 at the Wigan plant, which is the only producer of Hovis crumpets. Hovis is part of the UK food conglomerate Premier Foods. A second week long strike began on 11 September and the Bakers Union advised people that they would see a reduction in bread and crumpets in stores due to the walkout. BFAWU Regional Secretary Geoff Atkinson said: 'This has



**Strikers outside the Wigan bakery**

always been a locally run site, by the local people. There's many families that work on this site. If the hours are there, they should be permanent hours and not covered by agency labour. All our workers on this site took a drop in hours and in money to protect permanent employment on this site, not to protect zero hour contracts and agency labour' (*BBC News Manchester* 11 September).

The dispute became increasingly bitter between management at Hovis and the striking workers with increasing use by Hovis of Greater Manchester Police. The *Green Party Trade Union Group* blog of 16 September reported 'After a four hour battle with the Police and scab Management this morning Monday the 16th, nothing came out of the plant for two hours then escorted by the police the first wagon took 40 minutes to travel just over

500 metres, but a price was paid when three of the pickets were arrested at the main junction when the police used heavy-handed tactics and threw a female across the road on to her back narrowly missing the pavement edge and a set of railings.'

Striking workers blockading the gates at the Wigan site prevented up to 80 percent of scheduled delivery lorries from leaving the bakery, and those lorries which did leave were so heavily delayed that they would have failed to meet their delivery deadlines for stores in the Midlands and North Wales. Drivers based at the Wigan bakery had refused to cross the picket line with the Hovis lorries on health and safety grounds.

On 23 September news of a settlement between the Bakers Union and Hovis management came less than 48 hours before workers at the Wigan bakery were due to begin a third week of strikes. The official union statement said: 'Our members at Hovis have achieved an historic agreement with the company. Having already brought the end of zero hours contracts leading to twenty-four new permanent jobs, the action taken by those workers has ensured that zero hours contracts will not be provided by a third party. This landmark action by 210 of a modest-sized union along with meaningful negotiations with the company has brought about significant change that could potentially have a positive knock-on effect throughout the entire labour movement'

(*Food manufacture.co.uk* 23 September 2013).

Atkinson said: 'The BFAWU would like to thank Hovis for finally sitting down with us in order to find a solution to what was becoming a very bitter dispute over the use of zero hours contracts and agency labour at the Wigan bakery. It has been agreed that agency labour would only be used when there was insufficient commitment by employees to work overtime and banked hours. Agency employees who work 39 hours per week for 12 consecutive weeks will be moved to parity pay.

(*BBC News Manchester* 23 September).

The Bakers Union success in the dispute at Wigan Hovis shows how, in Marx's words, 'Trades Unions work well as centres of working class resistance against the encroachments of capital and help to maintain the given value of labour'. The success can help 'the initiating of a larger movement using their organised forces as a lever for the final emancipation of the working class that is to say the ultimate abolition of the wages system'.

Strikes are necessary if the working class are to prevent themselves from being driven into the ground by the never-satisfied demands of profit. The working class must organise to defend and improve our wages and conditions of work. The strike is a working class weapon within the profit system that can limit the ambitions of the capitalist class.

STEVE CLAYTON



## Ed, Ralph and Karl

ONE RESULT of the nasty attack by the *Daily Mail* (1 October) on Ed Miliband's father, Ralph, has been a revival of discussion about Marx and Marxism. They described him a 'lifelong, unreconstructed Marxist who craved a workers' revolution' Absurdly, they also claimed that

'his son's own Marxist values can be seen all too clearly in his plans for state seizures of private land held by builders and for fixing energy prices by government diktat.'

But there is nothing Marxist or socialist about taxing land values or price controls. The first was a 19<sup>th</sup> century radical Liberal demand aimed at weakening the landed aristocracy which then still stood in the way of complete capitalist class control of the state, and all sorts of governments have resorted to price controls.

But to what extent could Ralph Miliband be described as a 'Marxist'? He certainly considered himself to be one and was well versed in Marx's writings. He was the author of two books which influenced leftwing thinking in Britain, *Parliamentary Socialism* (1961) and *The State in Capitalist Society* (1969). In the first he dealt with what he regarded as the Labour Party's obsession with trying to move beyond capitalism step by step by constitutional, parliamentary means and explained how and why this failed. The second described how the top positions in the state in Britain were occupied by people from the same social background – families rich enough to send their children to the top 'public' schools – who controlled it via an Old Boy network whichever party had a majority in parliament.

Both books were used by the Trotskyist groups which mushroomed in the 1970s to argue that there was 'no parliamentary road' and that violent revolution was therefore the only way. Actually, this was not Ralph Miliband's own position as he held the more reasonable view that the road to socialism could and should involve both parliamentary and extra-parliamentary action.

But what did he mean by socialism? The *Daily Mail* wrote:

'Ralph's Marxism was uncompromising. 'We want this party to state that it stands unequivocally behind the social ownership and control of the means of production, distribution and exchange.' He declared to the 1955 Labour Party conference as the delegate from Hampstead.'

Here he was defending the Labour Party's ultimate aim (on paper) as set out in its then Clause Four. But there was nothing Marxist about Clause Four. It had been drafted by the Fabian Sidney Webb and committed the Labour Party to achieving, by gradual and constitutional means, the sort of state capitalism that the Fabians favoured.

We have always pointed out that the common ownership of 'the means of exchange' does not make sense. If there is common ownership of the means of production and distribution then there is no 'exchange' and so no 'means of exchange' (banks, etc.). The concept of 'common ownership' of banks only makes sense if common ownership is equated with state ownership. Which is what Ralph Miliband did.

This was confirmed by his attitude to Russia. He didn't regard it as socialist, but he did regard it as non-capitalist on the grounds that it was based on state ownership rather than private ownership. For him, all that was required for it to become socialist was for its political structure to be made democratic. So, his 'socialism' was full-scale state capitalism plus political democracy, a combination that has proved to be illusory.

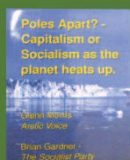
But state ownership is just another form of class ownership. That was Marx's view too. Which makes Ralph Miliband an odd sort of Marxist, but at least he understood more about Marx than his son.

## socialist party dvd



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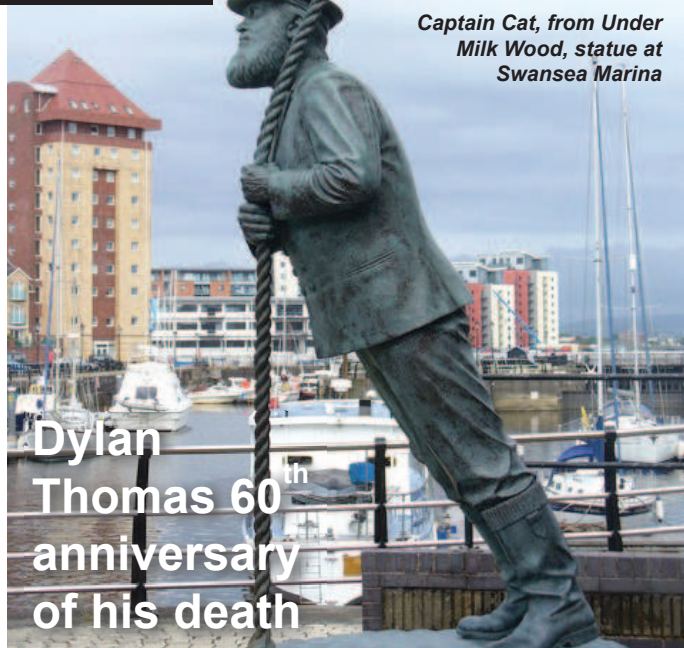


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*Captain Cat, from Under Milk Wood, statue at Swansea Marina*

**Dylan Thomas 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death**

ON 9 NOVEMBER it is the 60th anniversary of the death of the 'Welsh bard' Dylan Thomas, famous for his prose poem *Under Milk Wood*, and poems such as *Do not go gentle into that good night* and *And Death shall have no dominion*.

In 1934 Thomas wrote 'I take my stand with any revolutionary body that asserts it to be the right of all men to share, equally and impartially, every production from man and from the sources of production at man's disposal, for only through such an essentially revolutionary body can there be the possibility of a communal art'.

In 1933 Thomas had met 'communist grocer' Bert Trick in Swansea who became his mentor. Thomas visited Bert's grocer's shop in Brynmill which Thomas recalled in *Return Journey*: 'Bert Trick in the kitchen threatened the annihilation of the ruling classes over sandwiches, jelly and blancmange'. In 1933 Thomas writes of 'an outgrown and decaying system in which light is being turned into darkness by the capitalists and industrialists' and that capitalism because it 'seeks only profit for the few is not an efficient mechanism for satisfying the needs of the many'.

Thomas wrote that 'society to adjust itself has to break itself; society has grown up rotten with its capitalist child, and only revolutionary socialism can clean it up'. Later he writes 'If it can be forced home on the consciousness of the people that the present economic system is ethically bad, the seed has been planted that may in time grow into a fine revolutionary flower'. He saw society 'composed of financial careerists and a proletarian army of dispossessed. Out of the negation of the negation must rise the new synthesis'.

During the Second World War Thomas made films for the Ministry of Information such as *A City Re-born* which looks at Coventry and he says about war-time production that it 'makes you think what a hell of a lot they can produce if it's for use and not for sale'.

After the war Thomas wrote two film screenplays; *The Doctor and the Devils* based on the body-snatchers Burke and Hare in which he portrays the class nature of society and *Rebecca's Daughters* based on the toll gate riots in Wales in 1843 in which he says governments only bring in reforms when they are 'afraid of a revolution'.

In 1952 on tour in America Thomas gave free poetry readings for the Socialist Party of the USA. He died in the Chelsea Hotel in New York City sixty years ago this month.

## Dick Gaughan: Exmouth Arms, London

DICK GAUGHAN, the singer-songwriter recently played at The Cellar Upstairs folk club at the Exmouth Arms, Euston in London. Gaughan, of Irish descent was brought up in the musical traditions and culture of the Gaels; the Scots and Irish in the port of Leith near Edinburgh.

Gaughan began his recording career in 1972 in the Scots-Irish celtic band, The Boys of the Lough, played with Brian McNeill, fiddle player with The Battlefield Band, recorded a tribute album to Ewan MacColl, recorded a tribute album with Bert Jansch to Woody Guthrie, duetted with Billy Bragg on *The Red Flag* on the album *The Internationale*, and worked with 7:84, the 'left wing agit prop' theatre group.

Gaughan interspersed his set with anecdotes of his life in music and slices of Scottish radical, nationalist and Irish socialist history. He tells the audience that somebody said he was an 'unreconstructed socialist'. His website lists Karl Marx, Lenin, John Lennon and Groucho Marx as influences, and he supports the *Morning Star* newspaper. His song *Ballad of '84* describes the 1984-85 Miners Strike and salutes Miners leaders Arthur Scargill, Peter Heathfield, and Mick McGahey.

Gaughan performed *The Yew Tree* by Brian McNeill which describes the 1513 battle of Flodden, and also Calvinist John Knox. He performed *Now Westlin Winds* by the Scots bard Robert Burns and another Brian McNeill song *No Gods (and Precious Few Heroes)* which describes the defeat at Culloden. The song *Thomas Muir of Huntershill* by Adam McNaughton is about the Scots political radical Thomas Muir, supporter of the French Revolution, friend of Tom Paine, and who in 1794 was sentenced to 14 years transportation to Australia for high treason.

Gaughan performed the elegiac *Song for Ireland* by Phil & June Colclough, and then speaks of the James Connolly, 'Big Jim' Larkin and the 1913 Dublin Lock-Out which involved 25,000 workers and lasted five months. Connolly was a Scot of Irish descent like Gaughan, for a while a socialist in the Scottish Socialist Federation and later the Socialist Labour Party. Stephen Coleman wrote that Connolly's impossibilist ideas (socialism is impossible until the working class understands what socialism means) were an influence, among others, upon Jack Fitzgerald, a founding member of the SPGB in 1904. Connolly later abandoned this socialism and took up Irish nationalism and the armed struggle in the 1916 Easter Rising for which he was executed by the British.

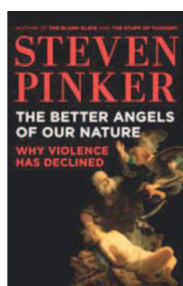
Gaughan concluded his set with *Geronimo's Cadillac* by Michael Martin Murphey which describes how Indian land was taken by the White Man and the Indian people given capitalism in return.

**STEVE CLAYTON**



# Angels and Devils

**The Better Angels of Our Nature.**  
By Steven Pinker. Penguin £12.99.



This is a real brick of a book (over eight hundred pages of text), but its message can be stated very simply: the extent of violence in society has been declining over many centuries and is still doing so. To support

this claim, Pinker cites a mass of historical statistics, and to explain this supposed trend he appeals to both political and psychological factors. The title, by the way, comes from a quote by Abraham Lincoln.

In part this drop in violence involves the drastic reduction or effective elimination of such things as bear-baiting, execution by means of breaking on the wheel, human sacrifice and the most gruesome forms of torture. Murder rates have fallen quite drastically, for instance from 110 per 100,000 people per year in 14th-century England to less than one per 100,000 now. But above all it means a reduction in the number of deaths in war, or, more accurately a cut in the proportion of the population killed in war. The Second World War was responsible for 55 million deaths and was the bloodiest conflict ever. Yet the An Lushan rebellion in eighth-century China was responsible for 36 million dead, and, if scaled up to twentieth-century population figures, this would mean well over 400 million deaths.

It may be reasonable enough to speak in terms, not of absolute numbers of casualties, but of proportions and a person's chances of being killed. Yet this emphasis on relative figures leads to some bizarre conclusions, especially the view that there was a Long Peace in the second half of the twentieth century: but then, all 'peace' under capitalism is relative. In the first decade of the present century, the annual global rate of battle deaths was less than one per 100,000 people. But this figure requires some careful redefinitions, such as saying that most of the deaths in Iraq were caused by subsequent 'intercommunal violence' rather than the American invasion itself. Moreover, a nuclear war is by no means out of the question now (see Material World in the January *Socialist Standard*). Also, it is not just war that needs to be considered: according to the One Billion Rising

Campaign, one in three women on the planet will be raped or beaten in her lifetime.

As for the causes of war, Pinker claims that countries no longer fight over scarce resources, though he accepts the existence of a 'resource curse', whereby less-developed states with plenty of non-renewable resources are often extremely violent. However, the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands, currently in dispute between China and Japan, may well have oil reserves, and war there is by no means ruled out. He also treats cases for and against going to war as rational solutions to a problem in game theory, with positive and negative values for the different sides either fighting or not. But this assumes that those who may benefit (the rulers and owners) are the same people as those who are likely to be killed.

Pinker has featured in these pages before (for instance, see our April 2003 issue for a dissection of his views on human nature and his misunderstandings of socialism). And things have not improved much here: he uncritically considers Stalin and Mao as representatives of 'Marxian socialism', and there can be no excuse for referring to 'the Marxist conception that all human behavior is to be explained as a struggle for power between groups'.

PB

## Global capital

**The Failure of Laissez Faire Capitalism.** By Paul Craig Roberts. Clarity Press, 2013.



Paul Craig Roberts is of interest as he is a former Assistant Secretary to the US Treasury under Reagan and an erstwhile columnist for the *Wall Street Journal* who has written an excoriating attack on

free-market economics in this book. In particular, he criticises financial deregulation and 'offshoring' of jobs and says these are part of what is effectively a conspiracy by the elites in the US and other Western countries to ensure an increasing amount of wealth goes to the very rich and ever less to everyone else. At one point he claims:

The United States is the first country in modern history to destroy the prospects and living standards of its labor force in order to enrich the

top 1% of the income distribution. Once a land of opportunity, America is being polarised by globalism into rich and poor' (p.117).

But there is of course a problem with this viewpoint, and one he does not address. America (like all other capitalist countries) has always been characterised by massive income inequality whereby the people who own and control the means of living receive colossal incomes that bear no relation to the effort (if any) they have made, while the vast majority are exploited to keep them in their positions of privilege and power. Reading this book, anyone would think that it is only since the Clinton administration onwards that these things have been a noticeable feature of life.

In fairness, one of the more positive aspects of this book is that there are a number of interesting facts and statistics presented at various stages to support aspects of his case, including on the real nature of employment and unemployment in the US. For instance, Roberts claims the real unemployment figure is nearer 23 percent than the 'official' 7.5 percent. There are also interesting statistics on changes in the US labour markets and on the stagnation of real wages there.

However, real wages for large numbers of US workers have been stagnant or declining from as far back as the early 1970s and this was never fundamentally addressed or reversed by the Reagan administration of which Roberts was a part. Indeed, Roberts seems very coy about Reagan and 'Reaganomics' and tries to argue that the growth of laissez faire capitalism has only happened in comparatively recent times as a product of 'globalisation'. To do this, he engages in some historical sleight-of-hand about Reagan's supply-side economic policies, claiming that these were really about reforming the US tax system to give incentives to entrepreneurs and workers. But of course they were about far more than this – including attacks on the trade unions to ensure labour flexibility and mobility so as to reduce costs of production. Indeed, some of the very things Roberts now seems to be railing against here.

The fundamental weakness of this book though lies in the lack of solutions proffered. 'Steady-state' growth is lauded but there is no serious suggestion about how this can be achieved within capitalism. The most obvious soft-spots Roberts has are for national sovereignty and protectionism, yet he glides over



the likely disastrous effects of the latter, which we have of course seen before, and which infamously led to the exacerbation of the economic depression of the 1930s and provoked the subsequent bloodbath of World War Two.

What Roberts has failed to realise is that capitalism has increasingly – over a period of many decades – become a truly global, interconnected system that operates according to its inherent, underlying economic laws. These are impersonal and driven by profit and the competitive accumulation of capital. Furthermore, this proverbial genie of globalised capital is out of the bottle and campaigners for national sovereignty, protectionism and the rest are never going to be able to squeeze it back in again.

DAP

## Labour, Lib-Dem, Tory



**The Socialist Standard examines their case**



## Fascist Pepperpots

'A THING that looks like a police box, that can move anywhere in time and space?' This is the appealingly wide-ranging premise behind *Doctor Who* (BBC1), as described in the sci-fi show's first

episode. That was shown in November 1963, and fifty years on, the *Doctor Who* brand is still as robust as a finely-tuned TARDIS.

Wherever and whenever the Doctor and his plucky companions travel, the show's storylines are often drawn from the real world. Many of society's concerns have been dressed up as a tyrannical regime or an alien invasion. For example, the 1968 protests were mirrored in *The Krotons* (1969), set on a planet whose students rebel against an education system only feeding them enough knowledge to serve their alien masters. And in *The Sun Makers* (1977), the Doctor stirs up a revolution on Pluto, whose workers are stifled by taxes (albeit oblivious to the SPGB view that taxation ultimately isn't an issue for the working class). The Doctor's most

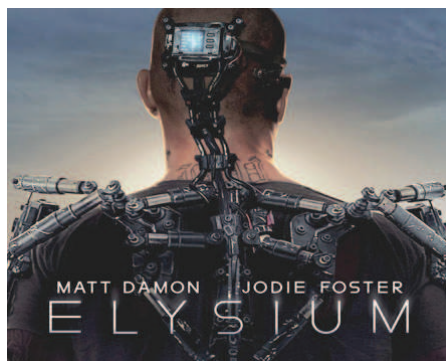


enduring enemy – the Daleks – represent Nazis, motivated by a hatred for anything unlike themselves. Early stories feature sink plungers raised in fascist salutes, while the parallels are clearest in 1975's *Genesis of the Daleks*, which introduces their Hitleresque creator, Davros.

Throughout all eleven of his incarnations, the Doctor has remained an anarchic character, backing the oppressed with little regard for officialdom. The show's libertarian streak feels at odds with how it is possibly the most commodified programme ever. Dalekmania hit the shelves of the nation's toy shops not long after the show's debut. And fans have been able to admire their *Doctor Who* DVDs, models and even Dalek condiment sets in rooms covered in *Doctor Who* wallpaper, wearing their *Doctor Who* underpants. Since its regeneration in 2005, the programme has settled back into being one of the BBC's blockbusters, with audiences always above six million in the UK, and more across over 50 other countries. Despite, or even because of, its commodification, *Doctor Who* has fired the imagination unlike any other TV show, and offers escapism from life in capitalism as well as raising a few points about it.

MIKE FOSTER

## Elysium. Written and directed by Neill Blomkamp.



By the middle of the 22nd century, the super-rich have gone beyond gated communities and exclusive enclaves. They have moved off-planet to an orbiting space station called Elysium, where they live in idle luxury with mansions and swimming pools, enjoying the best possible health care. Back on an overpopulated and polluted Earth, workers live in slums, battle unemployment and hard and unpleasant work, and have rudimentary health care.

That is the scenario in this film, starring Matt Damon and Jodie Foster. The stark class division is driven home in a scene where the scumbag CEO of one company tells a foreman not to breathe on him. The drive for profits means there is little or no concern for the workers who produce the goods and services.

[Spoiler alert] Let's not worry too much about the plot, which is so flimsy it has to be padded out with a lot of fighting. A power struggle among the elite results in the inhabitants of Earth being granted

Elysium citizen status, and the film ends with shuttles leaving the space station to provide decent health care on the planet below.

Unfortunately it is this power struggle, plus a few rebels from among the workers, rather than a mass revolt, that leads to this optimistic ending. It is also left unclear to what extent the Earth–Elysium division will be overthrown. But the political strength of the film lies elsewhere, in its depiction of a society divided so obviously that it is undeniable. And this is surely meant as a comment on the present day, not just a fable about the future.

For a mock-up of how Elysium treats would-be migrants from Earth, see [itsbetterupthere.co.uk](http://itsbetterupthere.co.uk).

PB

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**The Cases For And Against**  
**The Revolutionary Use Of Parliament**

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## Meetings

For full details of all our meetings and events see our **Meetup** site: <http://www.meetup.com/The-Socialist-Party-of-Great-Britain/>

## London

### Clapham

Sunday **3 November** 3.00pm

'Ehud's Dagger: Class Struggle and the English Revolution',  
Speaker: Rob Worden.

Socialist Party premises, 52 Clapham High Street, London SW4 7UN.

## East Anglia

Saturday **9 November** 2.00 - 5.00pm

'Food For the Future: Profit or Plenty.'

Speakers: Pat Deutz and Eddie Craggs  
Nelson Hotel (opposite the train station)  
Prince of Wales Road, Norwich NR1 1DX  
(The meeting room can be accessed by going through the Costa Coffee Café and down the stairs. The room is towards the Prince of Wales Road end).  
All welcome.

## London

### Clapham

Sunday **17 November** 6.00pm.

Film: 'Marx Reloaded'

Sunday **1 December** 3.00pm

'Hip-Hop and the Class Struggle'.

Speaker: Ed Mann.

Socialist Party premises, 52 Clapham High Street, London SW4 7UN.

## West London

Tuesday **19 November** 8.00pm

'France's burqa ban: What do socialists think?'

Speaker: Steve Clayton.

Committee Room, Chiswick Town Hall,  
Heathfield Terrace, London W4 4JN.

## Manchester

Saturday **23 November** 2.00pm

'What's for dinner?'

The Unicorn, 26 Church Street,  
Manchester M4 1PW.

## Doncaster

Saturday **7 December** 2.00pm

'Being Human in Socialism: Karl Marx,  
William Morris and Oscar Wilde'.

Speaker: Steve Clayton.

The Ukrainian Centre, 48 Beckett Road,  
Doncaster, DN2 4AD.

### SOCIALIST STANDARD INDEX FOR 2012

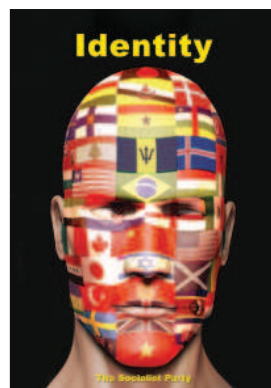
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## Declaration of Principles

*This declaration is the basis of our organisation and, because it is also an important historical document dating from the formation of the party in 1904, its original language has been retained.*

### Object

**The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community.**

### Declaration of Principles

The Socialist Party of Great Britain holds

1. That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (i.e. land, factories, railways, etc.) by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.

2. That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as

a class struggle between those who possess but do not produce and those who produce but do not possess.

3. That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into the common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.

4. That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom, the emancipation of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind, without distinction of race or sex.

5. That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.

6. That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organize consciously and politically for the conquest of

the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.

7. That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interests of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.

8. The Socialist Party of Great Britain, therefore, enters the field of political action determined to wage war against all other political parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist, and calls upon the members of the working class of this country to muster under its banner to the end that a speedy termination may be wrought to the system which deprives them of the fruits of their labour, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.



# 50 Years Ago

## Memories of a lovely war

IN A few month's time we are going to be submerged in an orgiastic flood of journalism to mark the fiftieth anniversary of one of the formative experiences of modern history. Already, hardly a week goes by without some promise of the coming deluge of words. This, in itself, is an indication of the enormous effect which the First World War has had upon the world.

Without wishing to anticipate any of the articles which are going to pour out



A recruitment office, 1914

of Fleet Street we can see, looking back, that 1914 marked a stage in the growing up of modern war. It was a terrifyingly new, different war, which gathered the strands of the wars of the previous fifty years and plaited them into a rope which noosed in millions of people. It flattened and mangled beyond recognition an immense area of the Franco/German frontier. It terrorised civilian populations who, behind the firing lines, had previously thought themselves safe from danger. It subjected its combatants, in the liquid trenches of the Western Front, to agonies of fear and endurance such as they had never conceived of in their worst nightmares. (...)

And what did all this achieve? The soldiers of both sides were promised that they were suffering and sacrificing in a great enterprise to build a better, safer world. But the events which followed 1918 justified those people who, for one reason or another, had maintained that war was futile. 1914-18 solved no problems—it only lined up the world for the next great conflict, which in its turn created the problems over which another world war has so often threatened to break out. What war does, very effectively, is to debase and to brutalise human beings, to encourage the worst aspects of human behaviour, to turn the world into a charnel house in which worthwhile human values are battered down and overridden in the general glorification of violence, lies and prejudice.

(from article by Ivan, *Socialist Standard*, November 1963)

# ACTION REPLAY

## Scrum Down

IN JUNE last year the top rugby union clubs in England and France gave notice that they would withdraw from the Heineken Cup, the competition for leading European teams. This meant that the 2013-14 event would be their last unless they changed their minds for some reason. With this competition about to start, and still almost complete uncertainty as to what would happen next season, the last couple of months have seen plenty of frantic negotiations and brinkmanship.

Behind all this are questions of power, with the clubs wanting more say in how the big competitions are run, at the expense of the national unions and the International Rugby Board. Who's in charge would cover matters such as the number of teams taking part, and how the competition would be organised. At present, teams from six countries are involved, with regional sides from Ireland, Scotland and Wales competing. In organisational matters, England and France can be



outvoted by these three countries and Italy.

And behind the wielding of power, as you might expect, is money, but with some specific variations. Heineken Cup matches have been screened by Sky for some years, and this arrangement was recently extended. But English Premiership clubs have themselves signed a deal with BT Sport that includes European games they are involved in. Under the proposed new Rugby Champions Cup, the money would be distributed in a way that benefited English and French clubs.

The uncertainty is leading to top Welsh players being signed by clubs abroad, as it is not clear what sort of contract the Welsh clubs could offer from next year.

There were even claims that professional rugby in Scotland could end if no agreement were reached and the Scottish Rugby Union failed to get its annual subvention from the Heineken Cup.

'If you look at the history of professional rugby,' according to the chair of Saracens, 'it has always been about this balance between union control and the clubs ... The BT Sport television deal has given the English clubs more of a chance to redress that imbalance' (*Guardian*, 23 September). The players and spectators barely rate a mention, of course.



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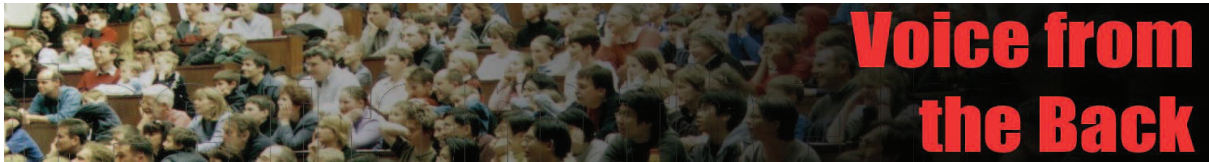
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# Voice from the Back

## The Class Struggle Today (1)

That we live in a modern freedom loving society wherein the owning class and the working class co-operate without nasty out-dated class conflicts has recently been shown as a complete nonsense. Britain's biggest construction companies finally admitted that they used a secret industry blacklist to vet workers as they announced the creation of a compensation scheme. 'Unions believe construction companies face paying hundreds of millions of pounds to the 3,213 workers whose details were kept on a database kept by a shadowy organisation called *The Consulting Association*. The information was used by 44 companies to vet new recruits and keep out trade union activists or those who had raised concerns about health and safety' (*Times*, 10 October).

## The Class Struggle Today (2)

It is a popular notion, reinforced by politicians, that the police force is completely independent of class interests. Recent disclosures by the Independent Police Commission however show that this is not the case. 'Police officers across the country supplied information on workers to a blacklist operation run by Britain's biggest construction companies, the police watchdog has told lawyers representing victims. Independent Police Complaints Commission has informed those affected that a Scotland Yard inquiry into police collusion has identified that it is "likely that all special branches were involved in providing information" that kept certain individuals out of work' (*Observer*, 13 October). Workers blacklisted for raising issues about health and safety on information from the police should come as no surprise to anyone aware of the present day class struggle.

## Hunger In The UK

We all know of charities launching campaigns to feed the hungry in Asia and Africa but here is one aimed at the UK hungry. 'The Red Cross said it was about to launch a campaign in supermarket foyers asking shoppers to donate food to be distributed to the most needy through the charity *FareShare*. Rises in basic

pounds that members of the capitalist class make from the exploitation of the working class. The owning class do nothing either except live on the surplus value produced by the working class. Astounded?

## This Is Progress?

Supporters of capitalism extol its progressive nature but we wonder what they make of this development. Energy giant SSE announced a price rise of 8.2 percent. It will send gas and electricity bills rocketing by more than £100 and there is expected to be a domino effect in the next few days with other major suppliers also slapping hefty rises on the average dual fuel bill. 'Pensioner groups said the elderly will be hardest hit, with many forced to decide whether to 'eat or heat' as the weather turns colder' (*Daily Express*, 11 October). A winter of discontent for many members of the working class seems certain.



food prices and soaring utility bills have helped push more than 5m people in the UK into deep poverty. Nearly 500,000 people needed support from food banks last year, according to figures from the *Trussel Trust* (*Guardian*, 11 October). Half a million relying on food banks in one of the most developed countries in the world – isn't capitalism wonderful?

## How Capitalism Operates

Mr Szymkiowiak is astounded by how capitalism operates. 'A first-time investor has told BBC News how he is 'pretty delighted' after Royal Mail share rose by more than 38 percent after the start of conditional trading. 'I could potentially make £300 for doing nothing,' Jamie Szymkiowiak said' (*BBC News*, 11 October). Mr Szymkiowiak may be astounded but that is how capitalism works. His modest little investment is as nothing compared to the billions of

## No Sympathy For The Unemployed

Many workers foolishly imagine that a future Labour government would be more sympathetic to the unemployed than the present government, but they should pay attention to what the Labour Party's position really is. 'Labour will be tougher than the Tories when it comes to slashing the benefits bill, Rachel Reeves, the new shadow work and pensions secretary, has insisted in her first interview since winning promotion in Ed Miliband's frontbench reshuffle. The 34-year-old Reeves, who is seen by many as a possible future party leader, said that under Labour the long-term unemployed would not be able to 'linger on benefits' for long periods but would have to take up a guaranteed job offer or lose their state support' (*Observer*, 13 October). The Labour Party want to run British capitalism and there is only one way to do that - as cheaply as possible.

## FREE LUNCH

